THE MU‘TAZILITE QĀDĪ ‘ABD AL-JABBĀR ON THE DENOTATION OF MIRACLES

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This article examines the Mu‘tazilite Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s views on the denotation of miracles according to his own particular methodology. Despite his acceptance of the celebrated method of the theologians in the denotation of miracles with respect to the authenticity of prophets, i.e., resorting to divine wisdom, Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār instead proposed the issue within the structure of conventional denotation; thus, his so-called “convention theory” distinguishes his endeavors from that of others. His efforts suggest the rationality of miracles. Unlike other Muslim theologians, he also argues that miracles not only vindicate the authenticity of prophetic claims, but that its connotation also includes the existence of God and the authenticity of the teachings of prophets.

Keywords: miracle, prophet, the existence of God, Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār

1) Introduction

The most important question concerning the issue of miracles in Islamic tradition is whether miracles denote the authenticity of prophets. The greatest amount of doubt about miracles comes from this question. For if the logical relation between miracles and the authenticity of prophets were denied, miracles would lose their religious value and would become regarded as no more than strange events that needed some sort of explanation.

Muslim theologians have primarily considered miracles to be signs of the authenticity of the prophetic claim (See Sobhani, 1417, p. 93). There is, nonetheless, a theoretical controversy among Muslim scholars whether miracles could be interpreted as rational arguments or persuasive evidences, which, at most, cause a kind of psychological

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inclination towards believing in prophetic claims. Though some Muslim thinkers, such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (al-Razi, pp. 41-53) and Averroes (Ahmadi, 1378, pp. 378-379), have preferred the latter, the majority of Muslim scholars adhere to the former and believe that the occurrence of miracles logically entails the authenticity of the agent's prophetic claim. They typically have offered two main arguments to show such a relation.[3] The first argument – which is more celebrated – can be formulated as follows (Sobhani, 1417, p. 95):

1. A just and wise God does not commit injustice and does not do that which is contrary to His wisdom.
2. God wants people to be guided to the right path; He does not want them to go astray.
3. Miracles are the evidence for the authenticity of the prophetic claim.
4. If those who claim that they have a prophetic mission perform a miracle, people will like and obey them.
5. Bestowing the power to make miracles upon false prophets is not a wise act.
6. Thus, according to 4 and 5, bestowing the power of miracles to false prophets is contrary to God's wisdom and would therefore mislead people.
7. God does not do what that is contrary to His wisdom and will never mislead people.

Therefore, the result is that:

8. God will never bestow the power of miracles on false prophets; thus anybody who claims that he has a prophetic mission – if he performs a miracle – must genuinely be a prophet.

By making use of justice and wisdom, this argument shows that giving the power of performing miracles to false prophets is a case of urging people towards ignorance, which is against God's aim for creation, i.e., the guidance of people to the right path.

A second argument is offered by Allamah Tabatabai, which is based upon the philosophical rule that "similar things are the same in their possible and impossible attributes." A brief account of the argument is as follows: Prophets claim that they have a relation with the Unseen, a relation which is rather odd and extraordinary. On the other hand, they perform miracles which are odd and extraordinary events. When we see that a person who claims that he has a Divine

3. Some have numbered these arguments as being limited to five, however they can still be reduced to two main arguments (See Ahmadi, 1378, pp. 370-400).

mission is able to perform something which is odd and extraordinary (i.e., a miracle), then we can generalize from this fact and conclude that he possesses an odd and extraordinary relation to God (i.e., he is God's messenger). Therefore, we should believe that he is correct in his claim that he is a prophet (Tabatabai 1417, pp. 85-89).

Qāḍī ʻAbd al-Jabbār's argument, which shows a logical relation between miracles and prophetic claims is, to a great extent, similar to the former argument. Its major difference comes from his different account of the issue and his so-called "convention (*al-muwādaʻa*) theory." This theory can be seen in the works of other theologians; however, it was Qāḍī ʻAbd al-Jabbār who together coined the term and refined the theory. He has put this theory in the heart of his explanation about miracles and makes use of it in all related aspects of the issue, including the subject of the performer of miracles.

2) The convention theory

Before directly engaging in the "denotation of the miracles of prophethood," he gives a detailed discussion on the methodology of the issue by showing how miracles imply prophethood.[4] According to ʻAbd al-Jabbār, a thing may denote another thing in three ways or methods: a) accuracy and necessity; b) motives and free will; or c) convention and purposes (ʻAbd al-Jabbār, vol. 15, p. 152).

(1-2) The accuracy and necessity method

ʻAbd al-Jabbār calls the first approach "the accuracy and necessity method" (*Tarigh al-Sihhah wa al-Wojub*). The major feature of this method is that if there were not a thing signified then no significant would come to signify anything. As it were, the significant depends entirely on what is signified; there would be no justification for the significant had we failed to find what was signified or failed to realize the manner of signification or if there was no signification at all. For example, an action denotes that the doer is capable of the act, for were the doer unable to perform the act, then no action might come from him (ibid.). Hence, a masterpiece denotes the knowledge of its creator. However, the manner of denotation is of much concern since this relation can only be established in such a manner. A masterpiece signifies that the knowledge of the creator comes from the mastery observed in the work rather than the work itself. The rejection of the knowledge of the creator merely implies the negation of the mastery

4. In his *al-Mughni,* vol. 15, p. 168 ff, Qāḍī ʻAbd al-Jabbār has written a separate chapter "on how miracles imply prophecy." Before that, however, on pp. 152-167 in the same book, he has dealt with the methodology of the issue.

of the work rather than the work itself (ibid., p. 152).

An objection which can be raised to this approach is that it involves a circular method. “How does an action denote the ability of the doer, so that, were he not able [to perform it], no action would happen? This implies [that we must consider] the action to be an offshoot of the ability of the doer, i.e., we should first realize the ability of the doer and then the action itself” (ibid., p. 153). In other words, one is first expected to know the doer, and then from his ability, to know the action, for an action may come into being because of the ability of the doer. In his response to this objection, ‘Abd al-Jabbār distinguishes between two kinds of orders: an order in respect to the existence and an order in respect to knowledge and understanding and argues that it is not necessary for the former to comply with the latter. “It is possible for a thing to be prior in the order of existence and posterior in the order of understanding and vice versa” (ibid., p. 153). This distinction must be considered in a *posteriori* reasoning in which the mind moves from the effect to the cause,[5] since the cause is prior to its effect in respect to existence, but could be posterior to it in respect to our knowledge, namely, we may come to know the effect first, and, according to this knowledge, establish the existence of the cause itself. Having proposed such a distinction, ‘Abd al-Jabbār obviates the circle. It is worth noting that, according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, the “accuracy and necessity method” is normally used in all arguments for monotheism and theodicy.[6]

2-2) The motives and free will method

‘Abd al-Jabbār has considered this approach to be the main method used in the issues of theodicy, saying: “According to this method, we may argue that God would not do evil despite His ability to do so. He will not do evil because He possesses certain attributes which prevent him from doing evil” (ibid., p. 157). In order to explain the designation of this method as “motives and free will,” ‘Abd al-Jabbār says: “We have chosen the word *motive* for this method because we argue that God’s actions are good solely because of the fact that they are done by God. This is because God’s motives require Him to do only that which is good” (See ibid.). In these cases, if there were no motive, the action could be evil, since in the case of lacking a motive for doing well, the powerful agent can do anything he wishes, including the evil action (See ibid.).

5. ‘Abd al-Jabbār, vol. 15, p. 153 "فما هو أصل فى نفسه قد يكون العلم به فرعاً و ما هو فرع فى نفسه قد يكون العلم به أصلاً".

6. Ibid., p. 157 "و على هذا الوجه نبنى جميع الأدلة العقلية فى التوحيد و العدل".

Moreover, the word “free will” is proposed here to distinguish this method from the former one. In the former method, mere accuracy would suffice for the argument. The action, for example, would come from the doer, though he had nothing but power. This, however, is not necessarily the case with motives in which were there no motives no action would come into being; however, those motives necessitate free will or something of a similar function (See ibid., p. 158). This method is used by ‘Abd al-Jabbār in issues like the infallibility of prophets (See ibid., pp. 158-159).

2-3) The convention and purposes method[7]

The third method is considered to be the most fundamental among the argumentations in religious texts (scriptures) (See ibid., p. 160). Here, ‘Abd al-Jabbār engages in a number of linguistic discussions. He argues that speech, and the understanding of it, depends on a *priori* convention; he holds that, in order to understand the speech, one must know the related convention and what is meant by the denotation in question (See ibid., p. 160). What helps us to consider a part of speech as an argument, and to validate the arguments used in religious texts, is this very convention as well as our knowledge of it (See ibid.). In order to explain how the understanding of speech depends on convention, ‘Abd al-Jabbār compares the denotation of speech to that of sign language. “Silent gesture has no meaning if there is no convention that, for example, such gesture means such a meaning, and so does the speech; if there is no convention there is no meaning to be understood” (ibid., p. 161).[8]

Accordingly, ‘Abd al-Jabbār likens the convention in speech to a prior convention in actions.[9] Thus, when one speaks to someone it means that they have coordinated in such a way it’s as if they have said to each other: “Whenever I tell you ‘Zeyd sets out to go,’ by the first word I mean this particular person, and by the second such an activity, and when I say this speech I mean to inform you about the issue. And if I added a word to the previous statement saying: ‘Did Zeyd set out to go?’ I mean to hear from you about the issue” (ibid., p. 161).

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7. The purpose is suggested in this method because there must be a purpose in compliance with the convention (See ibid., p. 162).
8. ‘Abd al-Jabbār says that there must be a prior convention both in bodily movements and words, nonetheless, it needs to be remembered that the speech is distinguished and much preferred to those movements. "إنما يفارق الكلام الحركات من حيث تتسع وجوهه و وجوه وقوعه لإتساع الحروف المتميزه بعضها عن بعض و كثرتها و صحة التقديم و التأخير فيها فيختلف فيها لذلک النظام و لصحة الإختلاف فی مواضع الكلمات منها با التقديم و التأخير و الإنفراد و الإجتماع و حصول ما يتخللها و لتعاقب الحركات المختلفة عليها." (‘Abd al-Jabbār, vol. 15, p. 160).
9. Ibid., p. 260. "لأن المواضعة كالمواطاة فی الأفعال"

According to what was said so far, and with the three methods proposed above, ‘Abd al-Jabbār intends to show the rationality of the belief in miracles as reasonable evidence of the authenticity of the prophetic claim. As it were, he seeks to demonstrate that the above-mentioned methods are accepted in the course of reasoning. However, the first method is used more prevalently in philosophy and rational sciences, the second in theology and jurisprudence, and the third in literature and conventional sciences. All three methods are authentic and any argument satisfying the related conditions of each method would be sound. This approach, at least, can be a brief answer to those scholars such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Averroes who are of the view that the epistemic function of miracles is no more than a convincing argument.

Had Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār succeeded in situating miracles within the structure of convention theory, we might have embraced the rational denotation of miracles with regard to the authenticity of the prophetic claim. The important point here is that since ‘Abd al-Jabbār has based the convention method on the motives and free will approach, which in turn is based on the accuracy and necessity method (ibid., p. 159), one may claim that, according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, there is a perfectly logical concomitance between miracles and the authenticity of the prophetic claim.

2-3-1) Denotation of miracles according to the convention and purposes method

How do miracles denote the authenticity of a prophetic claim? For example, we may demand a proof or evidence from anyone who claims prophethood. He then performs a miracle that we can regard as an evidence for the authenticity of his claim. Now, how does this miracle prove the authenticity of his claim? According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, the occurrence of a miracle has the following constituents: 1) the miracle; 2) the prophetic claim; 3) one who claims prophethood; 4) the performer of the miracle. Here, convention means that two people have agreed that something would be the sign for another thing. Consequently, in the course of miracles, it has been agreed by God, the performer of miracles, and a person who claims prophethood, that, whenever he proclaimed prophethood, God would perform a miracle by the hand of the prophet in order to let people recognize his authenticity. The occurrence of a miracle from someone who claims to be a Divine prophet means that God is confirming that he is a real messenger of God. As a matter of fact, this Divine act has replaced the substantiation of God by saying: “He is really my

messenger!"[10] Of course, 'Abd al-Jabbār is able to acknowledge that there has been no actual convention between God and His prophets, yet it can be supposed so.[11] In this way, the denotation of miracles is stronger than words, because words are usually exposed to simile and metaphors which are impractical in the case of acts (ibid.).

In stating his view that there is no difference between verbal and practical acknowledgement, 'Abd al-Jabbār gives the following example: "When Zeyd sends a messenger for 'Amr, and 'Amr asks the messenger for evidence of his mission, it makes no difference for the messenger to ask Zeyd to verbally acknowledge him [by saying, for example, that yes, you are right, you are my messenger], or to tell Zeyd, if I am right that I am speaking on your behalf, put your hand on your head and he does so. Here, putting the hand on the head has replaced the word of Zeyd" (ibid., p. 168). 'Abd al-Jabbār's main efforts here are to show that the word and act are the same in the denotation in question because the verbal acknowledgement of a messenger is sound evidence for the authenticity of the messenger but the denotation of the act is not as clear as this, thus demanding more attention and notice. In the above-mentioned example, 'Abd al-Jabbār tries to call attention to and remove such an improbability. He does not necessitate convention to have actually taken place, for the very course of practice indicates some sort of convention. "Even though there was no coordination, what has actually happened is similar to a previous convention. For example, if a master told his servant, 'Whenever I put my hand on my head, you must bring water…,' this does not differ from the case of a servant telling his master, 'Whenever you want water, just put your hand on your head.' In both cases, the convention is created. This is similar to a case preceded by some coordination…Now, if a prophet asked God to acknowledge his claim by performing a miracle… [performing the miracle by God], it would be equal to his acknowledgement" (ibid., p. 169).

In order to establish the denotation of miracles which authenticates the prophet's claim, 'Abd al-Jabbār necessitates four conditions. First, we should know that miracles are executed by God. Second, we should know that miracles are extraordinary (ibid., p. 171). Third, that the would-be prophet has claimed a prophetic mission. And fourth, that the prophet must have asked God to perform a miracle. The lack of each of these conditions being present means a lack of the related denotation. Were miracles not performed by God, there would be no convention and thus no acknowledgement. It is as if Zeyd calls

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10. See 'Abd al-Jabbār, vol. 15, p. 161."تنزل المعجزات منزلة التصديق بالقول"
11. Ibid. "بمنزلة المواضعة المتقدمة على التصديق"

himself the messenger of ‘Amr saying that the evidence for his claim is that he asks ‘Amr to put his hand on his head and he will do so. He then asks ‘Amr to put his hand on his head, but Zeyd himself puts his hand, or [a third person like] Ali puts his hand, on ‘Amr’s head instead. There is no logical concomitance here between Zeyd’s claim and ‘Amr, thus there is no acknowledgement.[12]

Do all God’s actions denote the authenticity of prophets? For example, does the fact that God provides for everyone’s daily bread denote that a particular person is a prophet? The answer is negative. Other conditions must be met in order to establish a convention. The only action denoting prophethood is one which is done by God after a prophet’s having claimed prophethood. “If, for example, a person puts his hand on his head after nobody having claimed that he is dispatched by him, there will be no denotation for putting the hand on the head. Such denotation merely comes providing the prophetic claim and its simultaneity with the putting of the hand on the head” (ibid., p. 168). A prophet must have asked God to do something in order to acknowledge his authenticity. It is not necessary for a would-be prophet to ask for a specific action from God; it suffices to ask for any type of action whatsoever, which, if done by God, creates a denotation (ibid., p. 171).

Finally, no action executed by God after a prophet has prayed for it denotes authenticity, unless it is extraordinary, for one would fail to detect the authenticity of the prophet otherwise (See ibid., p. 170). The issue can be illustrated thus: “If a prophet says: ‘O God, if I am right in my claim of prophethood, make the sun rise at its due time from its due sunrise, take it to its due orbit, and bring cold and heat in their due times…’ we would not know that these ordinary events are done to acknowledge the prophet” (ibid., pp. 170-171). Hence, miracles should be extraordinary in order for people to realize that they had been executed due to the demand of the prophet to be acknowledged (ibid., p. 171), therefore establishing a logical denotation between an act of God and the claim of a prophet.

What ‘Abd al-Jabbār has mentioned thus far, within the framework of convention theory, was an explanation for the process of the denotation of miracles that the prophetic claim can be authentic. One’s explanation may appear far more coherent and perfect; however it

12. The only way to realize whether an action is done by God, rather than by any human being, is that it must be a miracle so that human beings fail to perform that sort of action or some feature of it. It is possible, however, for an action not to be a miracle and still be done by God, but the question is that we would not have a chance to realize that it was done by God, instead of other beings.

does not mean that one's view is correct. While it is possible to propose different coherent explanations for a single event, only one of them will be sound and correct, namely the one with a rational justification. 'Abd al-Jabbār seems to manage the issue by resorting to Divine justice and wisdom in addition to the fact that God would never perform an act of evil. In fact, 'Abd al-Jabbār comes to explain a point similar to the premise introduced by the theologians in their argument for miracles, namely, "It is evil to urge ignorance upon people." He argues that God's wisdom guarantees the convention and expected denotation of miracles. God Almighty would never commit evil or anything with an evil aspect, He will merely do what is necessary, or something similar (ibid., p. 176). So, for precisely that reason, there remains no probability whatsoever for God's lack of intention in performing miracles and therefore a lack of denotation; for it "should have been done by a wise being who never deceives, so we must admit that, by miracles, God [intends] the acknowledgment of His prophet" (ibid., p. 180). The occurrence of miracles with no previous convention is some sort of deceit or misrepresentation whereas the Wise God is immaculate and exempt from such things.

2-3-2) Objections and their refutations

In order to shed more light on his theological views and theories, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār follows the method of dialogue. This method can be seen in his three major works – *al-Mughni fi Abwab al-Tawhid wa al-Adl*, *Sharh al-Usul al-Khamsa*, and *Tathbitu Dala'il Nubuwwat Nabiyyeena Muhammad* (pbuh) – where, after the explanation of his preferred theory, and the objections raised by his opponents, he proposes questions which he himself has devised. He also does this in his discussion of the convention theory. Since he has set forth many questions, we will deal here with the key ones.

a) How may one realize that miracles are performed by God? In the related examples of "convention," the two parties of convention and their actions are observable. Thus when a messenger claims that he was dispatched by S, and the evidence is that S will put his hand on his head, we can see him doing so, and there is no doubt that it is him who is doing so. In the case of miracles, however, God is not observable. How do we make sure that the miracle is not performed by someone else other than God? In his answer to this question, 'Abd al-Jabbār says, "From the very fact that it is a miracle we find out that it has been performed by God, for we know that other beings fail to do so…that others are unable to do so proves there to be a potent being different from others. This realization compensates for the case in which the two parties are observable so that we obviously see him

who did so and so" (ibid., vol. 15, p. 170 with minor alterations).

b) Granted that we have realized that a miracle was performed by God, we may come across another question – did God really mean to acknowledge His prophets by His miracles? How do we make sure that there was no meaning or intention other than that acknowledgement? Similar to literal and rhetorical meanings, it is possible for that to have a meaning other than what appears. In his response to this question, ʻAbd al-Jabbār says: "Wherever there is no indication contextual or otherwise, we should follow the literal meaning, leaving other possibilities. However, if there is an indication to show otherwise, we might say that it is applied to a rhetorical meaning. If we wanted to follow the rhetorical meaning where there is no indication for that, we might not understand anything from the word of God…now that it is the case with the speech, so is the case with events, or here, miracles. Even one may say that here the expected denotation of miracles is stronger than that of the speech, because the convention in it is similar to the literal meaning; thus there is no room for the rhetorical meaning in it. Therefore, as the speech of no indication applies to the literal meaning if it is said by a wise person, so do miracles" (ibid., pp. 172-173 with minor alterations).

Indeed, ʻAbd al-Jabbār has mentioned two significant points. The first, which is linguistic, is that we human beings, in all our negotiations and literature, attach our speech to its literal meaning. If someone, for example, says: "I have seen a lion," we will take it to mean the strong, wild animal of the forest. If we did not do so, and instead intended a rhetorical meaning, there would be no mutual understanding, and thus all negotiations would be abandoned. There are very few cases providing indications that we might intend a rhetorical meaning. For example, if someone said: "I have seen a lion shooting," on examining the indication of "shooting," we are justified to attach the word "lion" to a rhetorical meaning, i.e., "a brave man." Such is the case with miracles, ʻAbd al-Jabbār argues, in which there is a practical convention. This means that, since there is no indication to show otherwise, miracles denote the main literal application, the authenticity of prophets. As a result, no doubt remains as to the main meaning of performing miracles.

The second point made by ʻAbd al-Jabbār is a theological-intellectual presupposition. He argues that we attach the speech of the wise to a literal meaning. As it were, in order to achieve the objectives of their speech and practices, the wise follow the literal meanings; they never intend their speech to have a rhetorical meaning where they would provide no indication. For he knows that he would have failed

to get his ideas across, and therefore it would lead to a self-defeating objective. Because God Almighty is Wise and His wisdom is above all, when He provides no indication He must mean the literal meaning rather than the purely rhetorical one.

c) For the third question, the challenger tries to show a difference between linguistic confirmation, i.e., acknowledgement and convention, and practical confirmation in the form of miracle. These two cannot be judged identically. The difference is that acknowledgement entails a claim without which it has no meaning. In other words, there is no first-time linguistic acknowledgment, but a miracle can be so. Thus miracles cannot be judged like a linguistic acknowledgment can (See ibid., p. 173).

To be more exact, a claim and an acknowledgement are correlatives. Zeyd can claim that ‘Amr was right, providing that ‘Amr has said something. However, if ‘Amr has not said anything, there would have been no claim that needed to be acknowledged. This is not the case with miracles; for example, the occurrence of a miracle does not entail that a previous claim has been made. A miracle may meaningfully occur without a claim being made therefore there is no correlation between a miracle and a claim. The least is that there are a few cases where a miracle may occur without a claim. This is enough to undermine the denotation of miracles.

In his response to this objection, Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār addresses the issue in two ways: First, granting the difference, he tries to establish the denotation of miracles. He says, “What you said about miracles is right; however, when a miracle is preceded by a prophetic claim and a prophet’s asking God to perform a miracle, it would be similar to the convention thus equal to an acknowledgement. Zeyd’s putting the hand on the head – when a messenger to Amr claims his mission asking Zeyd to acknowledge him by doing so – is similar to the acknowledgement, and Zeyd could have put his hand on his head with no prior claim or demand, so are miracles” (ibid., p. 173).

Abd al-Jabbar, by this example, is arguing that Zeyd’s putting the hand on the head and the claim of his messenger are not correlatives, yet it may denote his mission, and so may miracles. As mentioned earlier, Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār is not satisfied with this, and assumes a second approach. That is to say, he totally denies that miracles are not preceded by a prophetic claim, thus proposing a correlation between a prophetic claim and miracles. He remarks that some people may believe that God would perform first-time miracles with no prior prophetic claim in order to add to the suffering of those under obligation. So does He as to the lust and the like (See ibid., p. 173).

Abd al-Jabbar forthrightly declares that such a claim is not to be accepted for it allows God's doing evil – and thus trust in Him is abandoned. Further, if we embrace that option for the case of miracles, how do we know that it is not the same case with acknowledgement? (ibid., p. 174). He also says that the comparison of miracles to lust is incorrect. "Because there is no evil in strengthening the lust, but it is there in a first-time miracle, namely that the confidence in all reasons would be abandoned" (ibid.).

In fact, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār insists that the embracing of a first-time miracle leads to an allowance for God's doing evil (ibid.), which cannot be true according to *'adliyyah* (Shi'ite and the Mu'tazilite) principles. What shows Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's precise scrutiny of the issue is his distinction between two meanings of "possibility." He admits that first-time miracles are essentially possible (presumably in respect to God's omnipotence), yet their occurrence becomes impossible owing to such Divine attributes as His wisdom.[13]

What is certain here is that Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār cannot answer this objection by appealing solely to his convention theory, for, as was said earlier, this theory is more like an explanation than an established theory; its establishment fully depends upon certain theological principles such as Divine wisdom and God never urging people toward ignorance.

d) The fourth question is, how do we find out if such a convention has been made between God and His prophet? To rephrase the question, the convention between God and one of His prophets is a claim that needs to be established.

Some scholars, such as Mutahhari, have gone far to say that the convention claim is wrong, denying any convention in the course of miracles; there is no conventional denotation in this matter they say. Thus Mutahhari argues that the denotation of miracles is rational; it is neither dispositional nor conventional. In their works, the logicians have classified denotation into three categories in terms of their origin: 1) conventional; 2) dispositional; and 3) rational. A conventional denotation is created by a convention following its function. Having known a convention and the created concomitance thereby, the mind may move to the idea of what is denoted from the denoting sign, like the denotation of the meaning of words and that of traffic signs and of

13. Ibid., p. 175.
أحدهما على ما لا يصح إلا به و معه. و الآخر على ما تقتضى الحكمة الا يحصل إلا به و معه إن الفعل قد يدل من وجهين

their related regulations. The inevitable constituents of such denotation are the practice of convention and becoming aware of it, and therefore this kind of denotation becomes fully conventional and mind-related. In their social practice, the wise have embraced such denotations for the ease of communication and to establish better social relations; such considerations have their own real products. Obviously, the denotation of miracles is not of this sort at all. Since there hasn't been a prior convention or contract as to the denotation of miracles, it comes into being automatically and without any prior agreement or mental acquaintance. In dispositional denotation, however, one may find out particular mental states and their related treatments from observing their apparent symptoms, as the human disposition demands. In such cases, from one dispositional symptom, for example, a change of color of the face to red, we can perceive shamefulness. This concomitance produced by the human disposition is achieved from repeated experience. In a dispositional concomitance, the simultaneity of the two correlatives is not necessarily permanent; they sometimes fail and different dispositions differ from person to person as well. Thus failure, difference, and exceptions are possible. Needless to say, miracles are not produced from the natural disposition of their performers. The third denotation is one created by the intellect; namely, a sign denoting something and the thing that is denoted carry the denotation by their essences. Perceiving the former would rationally take us to the latter. Such rational concomitance comes between a cause and its effect and the two effects of the one identical cause. Rational concomitance is an ontological relation, neither conventional nor dispositional. A celebrated example of this is to realize the producer from its production or the cause from its effect because it is impossible for a contingent being to come into being without a cause; here there is no need of experience or of convention (Mutahhari, 1372, p. 218).

In a nutshell, he argues that the denotation of miracles is rational and similar to that of cause and effect. This theory would undermine ‘Abd al-Jabbār's point of view, putting it at risk. As mentioned earlier, Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār regards the denotation of miracles as conventional, proposing the cause and effect denotation in the structure of an accuracy and necessity methodology. ‘Abd al-Jabbār's convention theory seems justified; particularly because of the fact that he has reiterated many times that there was no historical and real convention in the course of miracles (See ‘Abd al-Jabbār, ibid., p. 161 and 162). Furthermore, it can be said that Mutahhari's point is correct as well. What was cited from him in regard to the rational denotation

of miracles in fact appears in our awareness of the convention. That we realize a conventional denotation depends on the accuracy and necessity methodology as well as a rational denotation. Since God is wise and would never urge people towards ignorance, we find that there must have been some convention at work.

In other words, the challenger asked how do we know if there has been a real convention between God and His prophet; we may have a claim of conventional denotation provided there was a convention although there was not.

Firstly, we may respond on behalf of ‘Abd al-Jabbār that there is no historical convention between God and his prophet; however, it is similar to convention. Secondly, we may realize the convention according to our belief in God’s wisdom. It seems that, in addition to his confusion of the very denotation and our knowledge of it, Mutahhari has confused the two parties of the convention, too. He said: “It was not our convention that the miracle denotes the authenticity of prophetic claim.” We may respond that this convention is not to be between us and God, rather between God and his prophet, yet in some non-historical way but we may become aware of the denotation just by appealing to our reason.

We may conclude that, according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s view, the denotation of miracles is not rational – rather than conventional – at all. Out of his three methods, he does not embrace the first and second. “The denotation of miracles cannot be like how an action denotes the power of its doer…or like how good or evil necessitate some act from (‘Abd al-Jabbār ibid., p. 164). For this impossibility, ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues that these two methods merely apply to cases where no person other than God has a role.[14] In the case of miracles, however, God wants to do something for his prophet, so “a third method must be applied which is the one of convention” (ibid.).

3. What is denoted by miracles[15]

There are three different views as to what is denoted by miracles. Some have said that a miracle is an argument for the existence of God. This approach has been introduced in the theological-philosophical tradition of Christianity, and is vindicated in modern times by

14. Ibid. ".لأن ذلک لا يتأتى فى حال الغير"

15. In Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s definition of “miracle” the following terms are stipulated: a) a miracle must have come from God; b) it must be extraordinary; c) it must be impossible for other human beings; d) it must be particular to the prophet who claims prophethood, so that it leads to his authenticity; e) it must come after a prophetic claim (‘Abd al-Jabbār,vol.15, p.99).

philosophers such as John Hick (See 12, p. 70) and Richard Swinburne. Other philosophers, however, like Hume and Hospers (See 11, pp. 83-88) have leveled a few criticisms at it. This approach is of little record among Muslim scholars; it was the Naraqi who for the first time has dealt with it in his *Anis-u al-Muwahhedin* (see Khosropanah, 1385, p. 81).

The second approach common among Muslim theologians is that miracles denote the authenticity of a prophetic claim. As mentioned earlier, issues such as the way of this denotation, whether it is logical or convincing, rational or conventional, were in dispute by the theologians. Another question in this regard, is whether a miracle denotes the authenticity of the same prophet who performed it or that of all prophets in general.

The third approach suggests that miracles denote the authenticity of the teachings of a prophet. From among Western philosophers, Richard Swinburne and William Paly have tried to show that the authenticity of prophetic teachings depends on a miracle (Ahmadi, 1378, pp. 346-347). This approach is hardly sound according to Muslim theologians. They hold that "there is no relation between a miracle and the religious teachings and doctrines which are a set of clear rational teachings" (Tabatabai, n.d, pp. 22-23). In contrast to Christian doctrines, this approach taken by Muslims is inspired by belief in the rationality of the major Islamic doctrines. In addition to the three above-mentioned approaches, some scholars argue that miracles denote the infallibility of prophets (Karimi, 1377, p. 60), monotheism (ibid., p. 58), and God's Omniscience and Omnipotence (ibid., p. 59).

Like other Muslim theologians, ʻAbd al-Jabbār holds that the main denotation of miracles is the authenticity of prophets. As for the existence of God, ʻAbd al-Jabbār does not propose a miracle as an argument for the existence of God in his treatment of the issue. Nonetheless, in his response to one objection leveled at his theory in *al-Mughni*, ʻAbd al-Jabbār has said something which can be rephrased as an argument for the existence of God: 1) miracles are events which have occurred in the world of reality; 2) any event which has occurred has a creator; 3) no temporal created being has the power to perform a miracle; 4) therefore, there must be a (non-temporal) creator who has created miracles. Qādī ʻAbd al-Jabbār draws the conclusion that this non-temporal creator is God (See ʻAbd al-Jabbār, vol. 15, p. 170). ʻAbd al-Jabbār has frankly stipulated that it was an independent

argument for the existence of God[16] (ibid.).[17] This argument is quite similar to Swinburne's third argument through miracles for the existence of God. Swinburne holds that were there no god, we could hardly justify the occurrence of extraordinary events; it is more likely to justify such events providing the existence of God (Swinburne, 1971, pp. 291-292).

Obviously, miracles are not different from other occurrences which are impossible for mankind. The creation of the sun, the moon, and other phenomena which we cannot produce, such as a mosquito, are evidence for the existence of God, and so are miracles. It seems that the argument which is based on the origin and existence of miracles can be regarded as an instance of the argument from design or a soft version of the argument from causality and temporal creation. The objections raised against those arguments can naturally be leveled at this one as well (See Javadi Amoli, 1375, pp. 247-248).

As for the third approach, i.e., the denotation of miracles that signify that the teachings of prophets are authentic, ʻAbd al-Jabbār has said: "When God wants to show the authenticity of a prophet and his teachings… [He gives him a miracle]" (ʻAbd al-Jabbār , ibid, p. 164). From his phrase "فی سایر ما یؤدیه" (in the other things He gives to him), it can be understood that ʻAbd al-Jabbār understands miracles as denoting the authenticity of the teachings and acts of prophets. In his discussion on how a non-messenger prophet (a prophet who is sent to work under the teachings of another prophet due to the fact that he himself is not given new teachings) is not provided with a miracle, ʻAbd al-Jabbār argues that the aim of providing prophets with miracles is to vindicate the authenticity of the teachings necessary for the moral improvement of human beings (ibid., p. 244).[18] This, however, does not mean that the main denotation of miracles is the authenticity of the teachings. What he really means is that the direct denotation of miracles is the very authenticity of the prophetic claim; though the indirect denotation and the main aim of the authenticity of prophets are the authenticity of their teachings. ʻAbd al-Jabbār analyzes the issue thus: "We do not hold that miracles denote the authenticity of the points made by prophets…[but] rather the authenticity of his prophetic mission. Nonetheless, when this authenticity was established and we realized that his miracles came from God, we come to indirectly know that his teachings are correct

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16. "فصار ذلک فی بابه بمنزلة الإستدلال علی إثبات القدیم تعالی"
17. This argument is similar to the first account from Naraqi's argument (See Khosropanah, 1385, p. 83).
18. "لکی یعرف بها صدقه بما تحمله من مصالح الأمة "

too" (ibid., p. 221, with minor alterations and summary).

As for the denotation of the infallibility of prophets, 'Abd al-Jabbār has not taken a clear-cut position. However, at the same time he has not criticized those who have said that "miracles denote the infallibility of their performers" (ibid., p. 218).

4. Conclusion

Abd al-Jabbar's views on the establishment of the denotation of miracles are quite similar to other Muslim theologians, though his explanation contradicts theirs for he considers the denotation conventional rather than rational. After the passing of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, this particular innovation has not been investigated by other theologians, thus leaving the convention theory to fall into oblivion.

Furthermore, he differs considerably from other Muslim thinkers in regard to the denotation of miracles; in fact, he is more similar to Christian intellectuals such as Aquinas and Swinburne, particularly concerning the existence of God and the authenticity of the teachings of prophets. Thus he was the first Muslim intellectual who made use of miracles in order to prove the existence of God.

Generally speaking, as for the denotation of miracles, 'Abd al-Jabbār managed, at the very least, to show the rationality of miracles, and managed to demonstrate the rationality and logical concomitance between a miracle and a prophetic claim in terms of God's wisdom.

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